

In Kuwajima's book, Abul Hashim gets the attention he deserves

December 22, 2015

By Fakrul Islam Laskar for Twocircles.net

SHO KUWAJIMA, *Muslims, Nation and the World: Life and Thought of Abul Hashim, Leader of the Bengal Muslim League* (Delhi: LG PUBLISHERS DISTRIBUTORS), 2015, pp.ix+230, Price: ₹ 595

Sho Kuwajima is Professor Emeritus of South Asian studies, Osaka University of Foreign Studies (Japan). The present biographical work is a revised and enlarged version of his earlier article "Abul Hashim-Islam, Nationalism and Democracy" which appeared in *Life, Freedom and War: Twentieth Century South Asia* (Aakar Books, Delhi, 2010) edited by him.

Kuwajima first developed his curiosity on Abul Hashim (1905-1974) while he was working on the Bengal Famine (1943). In the midst of the famine, the organisational breakthrough of the Muslim League that was embodied under Abul Hashim in Bengal attracted the scholarly attention of Kuwajima and since then it became his field of study.

There are also various other works both in Vernacular (Bengali) as well as in English discussing Abul Hashim's thought and action in connection to his role in the growth of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Besides Abul Hashim's own works *As I See It* (1965), *In Retrospection* (1974) etc., there can be the mention of Syed Mansur Ahmed's edited work (2007) *Abul Hashim-Tanr Jiban o Samay* (Bengali), Mafidul Hoque's (1990) *Abul Hashim 1905-1974* (Bengali), etc. Sumit Sarkar (1983) in his book *Modern India 1885-1947* also mentions Hashim as 'the dynamic secretary of the Bengal Muslim League' who generated 'a radical image' of the Muslim League by pledging the abolition of rent-receiving interests in the manifesto issued in 1944 (p. 409).

While writing on Abul Hashim's access into politics and thereby to the Muslim League Kuwajima informs that initially Hashim was not so enthusiastic about politics. Rather he developed his interest first in social services. But the death of his father Abul Kasem (October, 1936), a member of legislature, changed the situation as the people in the village and the town of Burdwan wanted that Abul Hashim should lead the Muslims of Burdwan succeeding his father. This brought him to politics and thus he became elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in November 1936.

In October 1943, Abul Hashim met H.S. Suhrawardy (1893-1963) and expressed his desire to serve the Bengal Provincial Muslim League as the General Secretary. With the support of the later in the Provincial League Council meeting held on November 7, 1943, Hashim became the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Abul Hashim remained the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League during November 1943 to February 1947. After becoming the secretary Hashim pledged to free the League from three mortgages-Nawab family of Dhaka in 'leadership', Maulana Akram Khan's newspaper *Azad* in 'propaganda' and M.A.H. Ispahani in 'economy'.

Kuwajima then, while focusing on Hashim's visits at the districts and sub-divisional levels for organising the Muslim League, finds college and university educated middle class youth borne in the 1920s as his cadre and Calcutta and Dhaka as the main centre of their activity. Hashim's dynamism in strengthening the organisation throughout Bengal inspired the young bloods. During his time the influence of 'progressives' grew remarkably within the Bengal Provincial Muslim League.

The next important event which made Abul Hashim most prominent in the history of Pakistan movement was his point of order he raised at the Delhi Convention of the League Legislators held on April 7-10, 1946. Hashim pronounced at the Subjects Committee that the Lahore Resolution of 1940 contemplated two independent and sovereign Pakistan states and homelands for the Muslims of India. But Hashim's claim for an independent state of East Pakistan remained a lonely voice which only revived in April-May 1947 when Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950) and the like minded persons moved forward for a United Bengal Plan. But Suhrawardy finally came out from the United Bengal plan and in the Council of the All India Muslim League which was held in Delhi on June 3, 1947, he supported official resolution for the partition of India, Bengal and Punjab which Muslim League accepted. Thus in 1947 Abul Hashim not only lost his eyesight but lost his dream of independent Bengal.

The author also apprises us about the antagonism developed between Hashim and the communists who once helped Hashim in strengthening the League organisation and also in drafting the League Manifesto. Differences also grew between Suhrawardy and Hashim over the relation between the League government and League organisation. Breakage could also be seen in the Bengal League Leadership soon after the Suhrawardy ministry took over the charge. Because of Calcutta killing in August 1946 and the consequent communal riots Hashim and the League activists had to meet unmeasured challenge and finally Hashim submitted his leave from the work of the General Secretary in February 1947.

Kuwajima admits that Hashim's thought and action made the Bengal Provincial Muslim League a mass base organisation. Another important aspect of Hashim's life which Kuwajima refers to is that unlike other League leaders, Hashim appreciated the Congress led freedom struggle. Though Abul Hashim supported the views of All India Muslim League, he did not favor 'two nation theory'. To Hashim, India consisted of many nations like Europe.

Abul Hashim never showed a communal response even in the critical situation. Though his residence in Burdwan was set on fire in February 1950 and he was forced to move to East Pakistan, he did not instigate Muslims to fight against Hindus. His idea of a non communal Bengal and his thought of the integration of Pakistan went on together even after his shifting to Dhaka in 1950. Kuwajima also focuses on Hashim's love for culture. He not only vehemently condemned the planning of

banning Rabindra Sangeet but spoke for the freedom of expression also when in 1969 the Pakistan Government prohibited the publication of some books.

When Hashim moved to East Pakistan he did not get a warm welcome and in fact he felt isolated. Kuwajima, however, mentions that Hashim's isolation from the masses and his inclination towards Islamic Studies had already started just before partition. But during 1947-50 he was inclined more towards the philosophy of Rabbaniyat and made distance from real situation. Hashim could take breathe free and get respect which he had been deprived of since 1950 only when General Ayub khan became the ruler. Ayub khan became overwhelmed by the personality and Islamic knowledge of Abul Hashim when Hashim met him and appointed him as the Director of Islamic Academy, Dhaka.

Abdul Gafur in his Bengali memoir *Nishabde Atikrant hoe gel Darshanik-Rajnitivid Allama Abul Hashimer Janma Shatabarshiki* showed Hashim both as a thinker as well as a political leader. Kuwajima, by referring to Gafur, also notes that Hashim conveyed the message of Islam at a time when Marxism was predominant as the progressive thought. Kuwajima writes that Abul Hashim will be recalled as a thinker and political leader who incorporated in his life the ideal and despair of human activities including politics.

The book provides valuable information about the life, thought and activities of Abul Hashim, a Bengal Muslim League leader who made an impression in the political history of South Asia. Drawing upon hitherto unused English and Vernacular (Bengali) sources, this work makes a significant addition. There are few more biographical works on Abul Hashim but the specialty of Kuwajima's work is as he discusses how remaining within the fold of Muslim League Hashim continued his non communal stance and even praised the role of freedom struggle under the leadership of Congress. The book also informs us about Hashim's affection for Bengali language, culture and freedom of expression besides discussing his role in pre- and post-Independence period particularly during the Ayub Khan Regime.

The author is Research Scholar, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University